RADICAL DISCOURSES

ON

RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS.

DELIVERED IN MUSIC HALL, BOSTON, MASS.,

BY

WILLIAM DENTON.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM DENTON.
FOR SALE BY WILLIAM WHITE AND COMPANY,
158 WASHINGTON STREET.
1872.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1872,

By WILLIAM DENTON,

In the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

PREFACE.

THE following discourses, with the exception of the second, which was given before the Parker Society in 1864, were delivered in Boston Music Hall on Sunday afternoons, between the years 1868 and 1872, to the Spiritual Society meeting in that place. Several of them have been published in pamphlet form, and have met with a large sale. I send them out in a volume at the request of many who desire them in this more permanent form, and because it is thought that they may thus reach and benefit some who otherwise might not notice them.

WILLIAM DENTON.

WELLESLEY, MASS., Oct. 12, 1872.

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ORTHODOXY FALSE SINCE SPIRITUALISM IS TRUE.

EVERYBODY has heard of the witty saying of Sydney Smith, "Orthodoxy is my doxy, and heterodoxy the other man's doxy." But this is not what I mean by orthodoxy, when I say orthodoxy is false since spiritualism is true. I mean the peculiar religious doctrines taught by what are called the evangelical churches,—those who take the ground that the Bible is the inspired word of God; that man is totally depraved, and born to do evil continually, in consequence of Adam's transgression; who believe in the eternity of torment to which he thus became liable, and from which he can only be saved by belief in Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, through whose merits the true believer escapes the pit of woe, and passes through the pearly gates into the New Jerusalem, there to sing the praises of his Redeemer forever. The orthodox, therefore, include Catholics, Orthodox Quakers, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and a host of others.

We are in daily communication with the spirits of the departed, some of whom never belonged to any religious organization, never attended church, believed not in Jesus as a Son of God, and the Saviour, never professed to be born more than once, and were there-

fore orthodoxically wicked; yet we find they are in no hopeless prison, —

> "Where sinners must with devils dwell,
> In darkness, fire, and chains."

They are swimming in no shoreless brimstone lake, with waves of damnation rolling over their guilty souls; they are not crying for a drop of water to cool their scorched tongues; they are not even advising their friends who are still on earth to believe the doctrines of orthodoxy, and obey its requirements, that they may improve their condition when they pass to the land of souls.

But some of our departed friends were members of orthodox churches: they did believe in Jesus as their Saviour; they were baptized in his name; they believed themselves mysteriously born again, and died in the faith, with the full prospect of the heaven that had been preached to them, as a reward of the righteous, from their infancy. We now converse with them, and find them to be just such persons as we knew upon earth, save that their orthodoxy has been terribly shattered. They confess to us that the religious views that they held here were altogether contrary to the facts as they find them there, and that orthodoxy is as wrong as its name is right. They find no golden city with gates of pearl, no God seated upon a great white throne, no Jesus at his right hand, no twelve subordinate thrones upon which his fishermen disciples sit, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. There are no eye-full beasts guarding the throne, and crying, "Holy, holy, holy!" day and night; nor elders forever throwing down their crowns, while the crowd look on in holy admiration.

Thus we find that hell and heaven alike depart; and orthodoxy, dressed in crape, goes weeping after them. No more can the orthodox poet picture, as did Pollok in his "Course of Time," the sinners' abode: —

"Wide was the place,
And deep as wide, and ruinous as deep.
Beneath, I saw a lake of burning fire,
With tempest tossed perpetually; and still
The waves of fiery darkness [strange darkness that] 'gainst the rocks
Of dark damnation broke, and music made
Of melancholy sort; and overhead,
And all around, wind warred with wind, storm howled
To storm, and lightning, forkèd lightning, crossed,
And thunder answered thunder, muttering sounds
Of sullen wrath. And, far as sight could pierce,
Or down descend in caves of hopeless depth,
Through all that dungeon of unfading fire,
I saw most miserable beings walk;
Burning continually, yet unconsumed;
Forever wasting, yet enduring still;
Dying perpetually, yet never dead.
Some wandered lonely in the desert flames:
And some in fell encounter fiercely met,
With curses loud, and blasphemies that made
The cheek of darkness pale; and as they fought,
And cursed, and gnashed their teeth, and wished to die,
Their hollow eyes did utter streams of woe.
And there were groans that ended not, and sighs
That always sighed, and tears that ever wept
And ever fell, but not in mercy's sight."

This *was* the hell of orthodoxy. It has cooled down considerably since this was written. It was once as fiery as the primeval earth, when white-hot billows rolled along its breast; but it cools so much more rapidly, that our children may expect to find it a very

comfortable place of abode. All will yet learn that no worse hell exists than earth makes: the soul's condition, wherever that soul may be, produces hell or heaven, if we still make use of the names. If any thing has been demonstrated by the unnumbered communications received from the spirit-world within the last twenty years, it is this.

Since the hell of orthodoxy is false, man was never in danger of it, and he never needed any Jesus to save him from what never had an existence. Jesus, then, is no Saviour in the orthodox sense: no salvation came by him. He was no more sent of God than Patrick's baby, born yesterday; for the necessity of his being sent did not exist. He was no more the Son of God than Socrates who preceded him, John Brown who came after him, or we who criticise him; no more a Saviour than Socrates and Plato who shine like stars in the pagan heavens, or Garrison and Phillips who shine in ours to-day,— all of these men far in advance of Jesus in many respects.

The whole plan of salvation indeed, as taught by orthodoxy, is essentially unreasonable, mean, and unmanly: it will not bear the light of rational investigation for a moment. The whole human race had become, by the sin of the first pair, exposed to eternal torments, and were of themselves utterly unable to do one good deed, or think one good thought. They had no power to elevate themselves from the horrible pit in which they are born, none to save themselves from the terrible consequences of their crimes. In this lost condition, God, in his great mercy, formed the plan to save us through the merits of his well-beloved Son, who knew no sin, but became a sin-offering for us,

that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He suffered in our room and stead. Our chastisement was laid upon him, God treating him as if he had been guilty of all human crime; and we, by faith in him, are treated by God as if we had lived his life of perfect goodness. We have no virtue; but the virtue of Jesus is attributed to us. We deserve nothing but hell, — even the best of us; but, by some godly hocus-pocus, we are to be conjured into heaven. We are filthy, vile, abominable; but, as the old Orthodox hymn says, —

> "Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
> My beauty are, my glorious dress:
> Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
> With joy shall I lift up my head."

What a contemptible piece of business is this! Where is he, possessing the soul of a man, that would wish to sneak into heaven under the cloak of Jesus (and such a cloak!) when he knew in his own soul that he had no right to be there? Instead of lifting up his head with joy, a decent man would hang his head, and blush for shame. Suppose that robe of "blood and righteousness" should be torn from his back, and he revealed in his hideous nakedness!

The heaven of orthodoxy must be one of poltroons, and spiritless, fawning sycophants, who chant forever the praises of Him who cheated the Prince of Darkness of his due, and opened a palace of bliss for hell-deserving sinners, who, for the privilege of entering, must bow and sing glory to him who redeemed them forever. Such a scheme could never have been devised in America: it smacks of the despotism, the servility,

and the meanness of the Old World of kings, my lords, serene highnesses, and grand seigniors. The true, unbiassed soul intuitively scorns it. It says, "If I have done deeds worthy of hell, then to hell I will go, and bear its penalties like a man, asking no odds of the torturing gods. Let me pass for what I am (cloaks for hypocrites and cowards): I desire no heaven that I have not won, and I fear no hell that I do not deserve." The man who deserves heaven will have it. He carries the key to its gate in his soul, and needs no Jesus to indorse him. Give us justice, and what more do we need in the universe? All the sin of all the men that ever lived never deserved the pain of an orthodox hell for a single day; and any being that could be unjust enough to make it should be the first to suffer in it.

Reason cannot but reject this whole "scheme" of salvation. Finite man is guilty of an infinite offence against God. He incurs by this means a debt that infinity alone can pay. All earth's treasures cast into the balance weigh not the millionth of a feather; the brightest jewels of heaven move not the balance one jot: only the exchequer of a God can furnish the means to pay the mighty debt we owe. What shall be done? If the debt is not paid, hell and its eternal torments await every sinful soul. At length, Jehovah plans the wondrous scheme: Jesus, one with the Father, "very God of very God," as the Athanasian Creed calls him, comes down to this abode of guilty wretches. He is born of a woman,— a pure and spotless virgin, lives a perfect life, preaches the gospel of the kingdom, works the most wonderful miracles, is despised and rejected of men, spat upon, buffeted, and

is crucified, the just for the unjust. He bore man's sins, suffered in his stead, washed out with the blood of a God the damning spot of guilt in God's book of justice, paid the infinite debt we owed; and God can now be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

What a medley! — God is the creditor; yet God, in the person of his Son, pays the debt. Man is the debtor: the debtor is poor, and cannot pay one cent of the infinite amount he owes. God, in a voice of thunder, and with a look that strikes terror to the guilty sinner's heart, demands payment of the debt, and holds his glittering sword ready to cut him down unless the sum is paid. Man, in an agony, looks up, expecting the blow to descend. But now God's pity is moved for the trembling wretch. "You cannot pay, I know," says he; "but the debt *must* be paid to the uttermost farthing. How else can my justice be satisfied? Now I think of a plan;" and, taking a full purse from his pocket, he hands it to the sinner, who returns it to his creditor. God pockets it with a satisfied air. The debt is paid; justice is satisfied; and the sinner may now be justified. And this is the wonderful plan of salvation that angels desire to see into. Blind must that soul be that cannot see through it! Man was so wicked before Jesus came, that God could by no means pardon him; but he kills God, and thus crowns his wickedness, and God is graciously pleased, when he pleads the merits of Jesus, to forgive him, receives him into his house, and calls him his son! Yet, now that the debt is paid, and full satisfaction given, not one in ten receives the benefit: the great body of the human race must languish forever in hell, eternal prisoners for debt.

The God whom we are told declares that he will by no means clear the guilty, and that every man shall be rewarded according to his works, is, by this salvation, represented, not only as clearing the guilty, but predicating this clearance upon the sufferings of the innocent, and rewarding them, not according to their works, but their belief in the works of another.

The cruelty of God cannot be surpassed: he is, according to this salvation, the veriest Shylock: "I will have the due and forfeit of my bond, though every soul that I have made in deep damnation endless sink." At the same time, he has made them so beggarly poor, that they cannot pay. The sword of his justice, red-hot, can only be cooled in the blood of his innocent Son; and he is even yet to wreak his vengeance upon the great mass of mankind, who with good sense refuse to accept such a useless, contradictory, irrational, and unmanly system.

The God who made this plan must have less judgment than an intelligent school-boy, less conscience than a pettifogger, and less mercy than a Confederate prison-keeper. Hear what Watts, the orthodox poet, says of him,—

> "Our God appeared consuming fire;
> And Vengeance was his name.
> Rich were the drops of Jesus' blood
> That calmed his frowning face,
> That sprinkled o'er his burning throne,
> And turned the wrath to grace."

What a monster!

No wonder that men and women love Jesus, pray to Jesus, and sing, —

> "Jesus, lover of my soul,
> Let me to thy bosom fly."

God is furious as a chafed lion; Jesus, gentle as a turtle-dove: God is the jailer; Jesus, the deliverer of those that are bound: God is the heartless Jew, saying, "I stay here on my bond;" Jesus, the gentle Portia, suggesting to him, "Mercy is twice blessed: it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes." Yet both are, after all, the same individual. It would seem as if such a story could only have been received on the principle that it is right for God to do what would be infamous in a man; and that what in us would be utter folly may be in him superlative wisdom. And, when a man comes to that conclusion to-day, he will be prepared to kiss the pope's toe to-morrow. It needs but the fearless exercise of reason, and such gods will be speedily cast into the limbo where lie the defunct deities of Greece and Rome.

But, if Jesus is no Saviour, there is no forgiveness of sin to those who trust in him or pray to him. Put as much faith and trust in a rubber doll, and there is no doubt it would be equally efficacious in removing guilt, and sending the repenting sinner home rejoicing. "But I have felt it *here*," replies the Christian, placing his hand upon his breast. Yes, I have no doubt: that is just where I supposed you felt it. But the Mohammedan feels it *here;* and who saves him? The Catholic after confession, the Mormon, and the Buddhist, feel it *here;* and who saves all these? You ought to *know* it in your brain. The judgment is of infinitely more importance than the feelings in such matters, and, when properly cultivated and unbiassed, will lead you into truth.

The believer in Jesus is not saved from sin: he is not even saved from the filthy habit of tobacco-chew-

ing, as any church-sexton will tell you; and, on communion-days, you may see those who have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb take the quid out of their mouths, that they may put the body of Jesus in; and he then suffers a worse fate than he did on Calvary. The Christian believer is not saved from ignorance, bigotry, sickness, poverty, or, indeed, any evil; and all professions of this character result either from ignorance, or an intention to deceive. Salvation by Jesus is a delusion; and the sooner we see it and proclaim it, the better for mankind.

But if these orthodox doctrines are untrue, then the Bible, on which they rest, is untrue. It teaches the existence of an "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," — a "lake that burns with fire and brimstone;" and, if the Bible-writers had been acquainted with the article, it had doubtless burned with petroleum also. The orthodox heaven is the heaven of the Bible: its God-man is he who says, "Before Abraham was, I am," and, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It is the Bible that represents Jesus as the Saviour; and by its texts, hammered like nails, every Sunday, into rickety souls, orthodoxy is still supported, and scares its victims from the exercise of their reason, or cajoles them into the support of its delusions.

Man does not go down to the grave at death to come up no more, as the Bible declares; neither does he sleep in the dust till awakened by a great trumpet-blast, as the Bible also declares. There will be no judgment-day, with a great king reviewing all nations, divided into the two classes, righteous and wicked; for there are no such persons, all people being partly good,

and partly bad. Our friends that departed are neither dead nor asleep: they live and love, and come to us, teaching us that the life of the future is but a continuation of that of the present, and altogether different from the gloomy and unnatural views of it given in the Bible, which must cease, before long, to be regarded as authority by a single thinking soul.

You tell me that the Bible is the text-book of our churches; it is read in our schools, recognized in our courts of justice, and reverenced even by our men of science. Yes; and it was the text-book of all slaveholders from New Jersey to Texas; it was reverenced by Constantine, the bloody tyrant of the fourth century, and is reverenced to-day by nearly every criminal that our prisons hold. The less that is said about the reverence that men of science have for it, the better. The reverence that such men as Agassiz, Dana, Dawson, and others, have for it, is the fraternal greeting of Joab, who speaks peaceably to Abner, but smites him under the fifth rib, so that he dies: a kiss is on their lips, but a dagger in their hands.

We cannot do otherwise than discard the Bible as authority; and, should it be retranslated and amended a thousand times, it would still be the same. It abounds with the grossest fables; it tells the filthiest and bloodiest stories; it contains bad grammar, bad logic, innumerable contradictions, bad science, and, what is worse, bad morality. It has been the bulwark of slavery, woman's degradation, bigotry, and religious persecution, in every age, and blasts every soul that submits with unquestioning reverence to its teachings. Under the direction of orthodoxy, it has made Jesus a highwayman, who clutches men by the

throat, and demands, "Your soul's life, or belief in my doctrine." And we have been so cowardly as to allow him to parade our highways, and throttle our citizens, almost without expostulation, because he lets loose the hound of public opinion upon those who refuse to yield to his outrageous demand.

Jesus must come to us as a philosopher does, and present his reasons for the faith that he demands; he must place his doctrine before us as a merchant does his wares, and we must judge for ourselves whether they are worthy of our acceptance. What should we think of the merchant who demanded that we should close our eyes before we purchased his goods? We should naturally conclude that they would not bear examination, and that he wished to cheat us. When a man says to us, "He that believeth not what I teach shall be damned," he is attempting to close the eyes of our reason; and we need to be doubly cautious in receiving what he presents. "So much of your doctrine as appears to us to be reasonable, Jesus, we will accept; and, if you are a sensible man, this is all you can desire: if you are otherwise, we are not to be troubled by you."

The day of unquestioning acceptance, of childish, gaping belief, is forever over. We say to Moses, "Come with your old stories of God-planted gardens; of God-created innocent people, who did not know good or evil till they had partaken of a mysterious and forbidden fruit; of wonderful walking and talking snakes; of the ark that saved ten times as many as could get into it: we will receive you as we do the Arab with his "Nights' Entertainments," and Swift with his stories of the Liliputians and Brobdingnagians.

One is as reasonable as the other. Men are as likely to be forty feet high as to be nine hundred and sixty-nine years old. You are just as welcome as they. Your tales can go with those of "Sinbad the Sailor," the "Wonderful Lamp," and the "Forty Thieves,"—no worse thieves than the Israelites after they had been forty years under your tuition. You saw God as Aladdin saw the enchanted garden. You talked with him as really as Aladdin with the geni, and received the tables of stone from him just as truly as Sinbad picked up the precious stones in the Valley of Diamonds. But you must not expect of us any more than this. You cannot make us believe that you talked with the Universal Soul; that he engaged you to make the fantastic fooleries for your tabernacle, and sat upon a shittim-wood box, and chatted with you by the hour,* and permitted impertinences from you that a king would not permit from his prime-minister. We tell you plainly that you state, what, in the nature of things, must be false, and what, if any man should declare to-day, his neighbors would consider him in consequence deranged or an infamous liar."

We will give the Bible a place with the Koran, the Talmud, the Book of Mormon, the Vedas and Shasters, Swedenborg's works, and Davis's Divine Revelations,—no more from God than they, and no more to be taken as authority than they.

But if the Bible of orthodoxy is false, so is the God that it reveals,—Jehovah, the great object of religious worship in the churches all over this broad land. The Jewish Jehovah is no less an idol than the Beelzebub of the Philistine, or the Jove of the Roman. The one

* Exodus xxv. 10, 22.

is just as blessed as the other; the one is just as much our Maker as the other. If the man who worships Jupiter is an idolater, the man who worships Jehovah is equally so. If the temples of Jupiter were the fanes of an idolatrous people, then the steeple-crowned churches of orthodoxy are the temples of idolatrous worship; and the ministers who officiate in their pulpits are but priests at the altar of the one great idol. A prayer offered to Jupiter is just as good as a prayer offered to Jehovah: "O Jupiter! father of the gods, and lord of lords; thou who created the heavens and the earth, and man to dwell upon it: we beseech thee to hear our prayer, and give heed to the voice of our supplication. Thou wert the god of Remus and Romulus, the god of Cæsar and Seneca, and thou art our god, and we will worship thee. Thou wert with thy people, the Romans, and subdued all nations upon earth to their sway; thou gavest them dominion from sea to sea, and from Rome to the ends of the earth. O Jupiter! be with us as thou wert with them; subdue our enemies before us; let thy spirit, and the spirit of thy wife Juno, descend, and dwell in our hearts, and abide with us forever. Hear us and help us. Give us of thy light, thy wisdom, and thy power, that we may serve thee with our whole souls while here, and be fitted to enjoy the heaven of the gods hereafter." Why is not that as good as ninety-nine hundredths of the prayers offered in our orthodox churches? It will ascend just as high, and be just as effectual in bringing a blessing down. Jove is as nigh to them that call upon him as Jehovah; and we are as much his offspring as we are the children of Him whom Paul calls the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What has the Soul of the universe to do with that being who cursed Adam and Eve, and Eve more than Adam, for doing what, with the nature he had given them, they could not help doing? — a being who curses on account of them every child born into the world. Is the Soul of the universe related to Him who walked about in a garden, and, like children playing at hide-and-seek, called out, "Adam, where art thou? To Him who wrestled with a tricky Jewish stock-breeder for a whole night, and only escaped from his hands by putting his thigh out of joint?

What have we to do with a being that turned water into blood, made lice out of dust, filled the land of Egypt with flies and frogs, and at length murdered more than a million people, because Pharaoh did what he had predetermined that he should do, and so hardened his heart that he could not avoid doing? — a being who gave a country already occupied to a nation who had no right to a foot of it, and made every man in that nation a murderer that they might conquer and possess it?

Was it the Soul of the universe that tempted Abraham to slay his cherished son, and, when the infatuated patriarch took up the knife to perform the dreadful deed, sent his angel to stay the murderous hand, and said, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. . . . And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast obeyed my voice"?

What a pious old saint to be sure! — ready to commit a murder because a voice commanded him. Human nature, and the God within, should have led him to

reply, "I won't touch the lad for you nor the universe; and I despise you for asking me to do such an infamous deed." When men set up such a great bloody idol as this for a God, it is our duty, as recipients of clearer light, to overthrow it, and deliver the world from its curse.

Neither Elohim nor Jehovah created the earth and the heavens in six days, nor in sixty millions. He did not make man about six thousand years ago; for man has been here a hundred times as long. He did not curse man with death; for death was in the world ages before man made his appearance. In short, he never did any thing, for he is not; and his worshippers are as truly idolaters as those whose condition they deplore.

But I am asked, "How is it that men of well-developed minds and cultivated intellects have bowed down to this God, and accepted the religion that inculcates his worship? Why is it, that, among the most intelligent people of this planet, Jesus is regarded as the Saviour, and Jehovah as the God and Father, of all?"

The mass of the people ask only that a thing shall be popular. If they find a faith in existence in their country when they arrive, — and where is the country destitute of one? — ninety-nine out of every hundred draw it in as they do their mother's milk. When grown to the age of understanding, how difficult to deliver ourselves from the influence of early training, and still more, perhaps, to resist the psychologic influence of the masses surrounding us! As the magnetism of the earth causes every poised needle to point to the north; so the influence of a people's faith bears on every individual, and tends to bring each to the same

opinion. But few are able to withstand its power. Of a thousand born in Arabia, there is not, probably, more than one who thinks of questioning the popular faith, — "There is one God, and Mohammed is his prophet." Tell them that Mohammed was like other men, except that he was more shrewd and more fanatical, and they exclaim at once, "You infidel dog!" The more intelligent say, "If you have no respect for our prophet, have some for these indisputable facts: Mohammedans number to-day one hundred and thirty millions. Established six hundred years after Christianity, our religion has supplanted it in its original home. It has overspread, not only Arabia, but Persia, Turkey, Palestine, a large portion of South-eastern Asia, and half of Africa. When all Christian countries were buried in the ignorance of the dark ages, then science flourished only where our religion fostered it. Can you not see the hand of God in such a career? and is it not evident that Mohammed was indeed what he proclaimed, — the prophet of God?" *We* cannot see this, of course. Neither can I see the hand of God in the career of Jesus, nor in Christianity since his death. When Christianity was first taught, Jesus was expected to be seen "coming in the clouds" every day, to reward those who believed in him, and punish all who rejected his gospel. What more natural than for the multitude, who desire to be on what seems the safe side, to accept this simple faith in Jesus, which promises such unspeakable blessings here and hereafter, and deliverance from the terrible woes denounced against the unbeliever? When the multitude have accepted a certain religion, how few, even of men of science, have backbone enough to

reject it, when at heart they despise the creed that cramps them! Humboldt is content privately to sneer at orthodoxy, but never publicly attacks it. Agassiz states what falsifies the Mosaic story, and evidently disbelieves it, and yet so writes as to lead people to think that he credits its fables. Müller, the linguist, shows conclusively, that he has outgrown all faith in the miraculous inspiration of the Bible; but his position keeps him from boldly declaring the fact. It is not bearing false witness to say, that at least three-fourths of the scientific professors in England and America have no faith in Christianity as a miraculous religion; but their position is such, that very *few* dare to be true to their inward convictions.

But I am asked, "How could Jesus have attained the lofty position that he at present occupies, how could he have commanded the veneration of the wisest and the best for nearly two thousand years, if he was not indeed the Son of God, and the Saviour of mankind?"

The time in which he was born was one of ignorance and superstition; faith in miracles was almost universal; and but little knowledge existed of the operations of natural law. The whole Jewish nation was looking for the Messiah; and this was just the soil in which he might be expected to spring up. How many who believe in Jesus in America would accept as a Son of God, and a miraculous Saviour, the man who could present no better credentials than Jesus did? — his mother denying that he was his reputed father's son, the only evidence to show that he was not illegitimate being such as dreams furnish. He lives for thirty years, but does scarcely any thing

worthy of record: he picks out for his disciples twelve illiterate and superstitious fishermen, who appear, from the record, to have been ready to believe any thing that their master told them. When the sceptical very properly ask him for a sign, he abuses them by calling them an evil and adulterous generation. Should a man perform all the miracles that Jesus is *said* to have performed, how many believers would he have now? — not one-half of those who saw him do them. Circumstances favored the claim of Jesus, just as they favored Mohammed, and as they favored Gautama. Jesus was not the first, by a hundred, who had called himself the Christ, or was so considered by others; and, after his time, there were "Christs many." How could Gautama be the centre of attraction to thousands of millions (four hundred millions now living), if he was not what the Buddhists believe him to have been, — a god, and the savior of mankind? How came such gods as Zeus, Jove, Hercules, Bacchus, and Esculapius, to be worshipped by the master-intellects of Greece and Rome for ages? — beings that never existed at all, yet commanded the heart's adoration of thousands of millions of the wisest and best of their time. Do you, Protestant, suppose that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was any more than a dark-eyed, chatty Jewish maiden, who, going barefoot to the well at Nazareth, captivated the mechanic, Joseph, as he worked on the roof of a neighboring house? Yet read the Catholic prayer-book, and see the adoration paid to their queen of heaven, the mother of God, whom millions beg to intercede for them.

When a man asks me to accept Christianity because

of its widespread power and influence, I say to him, Why not turn Buddhist? Christianity numbers two hundred millions of believers; but Buddhism has a list of four hundred millions. If the fact contained in the first figures makes Christianity the true religion, and Jesus the Son of God, then Buddhism must be doubly true, and Gautama twice as much God's son.

Jesus was a man who taught many beautiful and excellent lessons; a man who sympathized with the poor, and denounced their tyrants, but at the same time taught many lessons that were neither true nor beautiful; a man who displayed overweening self-esteem, and who was much more desirous that men should believe in him than that they should be true to themselves. He is no more our master than George Fox, John Wesley, or Joseph Smith. We do not therefore exhort men to "stand up for Jesus," but to stand up for humanity that needs it. Man has been trampled upon, his reason denounced, his selfhood cast down, that an idol might be elevated upon it. Jesus is the Christian Juggernaut. In India, the devotees throw their bodies before the idol: in Christian countries, they prostrate their souls before theirs; and Jesus in his triumphal car, drawn by his blinded followers, encouraged by his priests, rides ever over them. Let a man offer his reasonable protest against this idolatry, and he is at once denounced as the vilest criminal; the orthodox bloodhounds are put upon his track, and their bayings tell how gladly they would hunt the heretic to death if they only had the power, as they had before intelligence muzzled them.

All these false, then is orthodoxy false. These churches of the living God, so called, are shams every

one ; and the ceremonies performed in them the veriest child's play. What has the Soul of the universe to do with their pompous prayers, their silly rituals, their sprinklings, dippings, and port-wine sippings, called holy sacraments ? what to do with their begging, beseeching, sometimes howling prayer-meetings ? their mesmeric revivals, in which the hallucination of one is communicated to the many, and a foolish consistency leads men to cling to it for life ? God has no more to do with all this than he has with the shoe-shops of Massachusetts, or the printing-offices ; and it would be just as proper to call a ball-club the club of God as a hundred ignorant orthodox believers God's church. It is high time that the pretensions of the high priests of a no better than pagan mythology were scouted, and a true estimate made of their sanctity, knowledge, and power. Professing to know God, they are the most ignorant of him, for they do not study Nature by science, which alone reveals him ; pretending to teach men the way to heaven, they close the door against the very angels who come to reveal it.

Spiritualism is to aid greatly in delivering us from orthodox tyranny and idolatrous man-worship, leading men to the God and Saviour within that each possesses, to the salvation that comes by the exercise of our own powers, and to the heaven for all, of which no Peter keeps the key, and to which the name of Jesus is no "*Open, sesame.*" Think of the time and energy wasted in praising Jesus, praying to Jesus, preaching Jesus, and the labor and money squandered in spreading abroad fantastic statements concerning this man, over the world, instead of giving people a knowledge of themselves and the laws of the universe, — knowledge that concerns us every day.

But orthodoxy has seen its greatest triumphs; and its day of prosperity is over. Its feeble stars are paling in the light of the new morn that greets humanity. It is already ashamed of its hell, — a phantom conjured up in the days of ignorance by some undeveloped soul, who, in deep malignity, wished that those who had offended him here might be infinitely tortured hereafter. The brimstone and the smoke are indeed gone; the Devil, the dusky jailer of the pit, is dead. And what becomes of orthodoxy then? Hell has been the fire whose heat created nine-tenths of the steam that ran the machinery. Take the fire of hell out of a revival, and then try to keep it up! You might as well think of running a locomotive by crowding the fire-box with ice-blocks. No fire, no steam; no steam, no motion; the orthodox train at a dead stand-still. How many missionaries would wander into foreign lands to preach the story of the cross, if Jesus does not save his believers from hell? How long would Christian churches be crowded to listen to dry-as-dust sermons, and nod over mile-long prayers, if the hearers did not imagine, that, in some way, this helps them "to escape the jaws of hell"?

Orthodoxy is doomed, and is powerless as its God to avert its doom. And why should we mourn? It scatters its hymn-books, pious tracts, and Bibles, but stands at the door of our public library, and refuses on its market-day (Sunday) to open, and admit the hungry souls; for that might diminish the attendance at its temples. It would thus stand at the door of heaven, if it had the power, and admit none but the bigots who can pronounce its shibboleth. It would "circumnavigate the globe to disturb the creed of a single beg-

gar;" but it would not stir a step to break the chains of four million slaves, and cursed, in the name of Jehovah, all who did: but, when infidel abolitionists made antislavery popular, it joined in the cry for freedom, and now demands that all the credit of the slave's freedom shall be given to the "church of the Lord Jesus Christ." It imprisoned Galileo; it murdered Bruno; it slandered and belied Thomas Paine, and still repeats its calumnies and lies; it burned Michael Servetus; it hung the Quakers, who were less orthodox than its creed; it imprisoned Abner Kneeland, and compels our children to listen daily to the reading of its Jewish story-book, that it claims contains the will of "God Most High." If its prayers had been of any avail, it would have murdered Theodore Parker: it did its best, and now sits, and gnashes its teeth at those it is no longer able to tear. It dooms Dickens to damnation, because his heart was too large, and his intellect too clear, to accept its dogmas, and by his presence there makes its hell so much more attractive than its heaven. He had his faults, who is without them? but none one-half as bad as the bigotry of the reverend Maw worms that anathematize him. "He was no Christian," say the bigots. Let us hope that he was not. He was something very much superior,— a man of surpassing genius and world-wide humanity, whose name will be blessed when orthodoxy will be a by-word among all people.

What, then, have we to do with orthodoxy? Shall we give our money to raise its proud steeples? shall we send our children to its Sunday schools to have fetters fastened upon their limbs that it will take years to break? shall we pay for pews in its heathen temples,

and reverence its false gods? If all who are reformers at heart would assert their individuality, we should soon see the good time that we hope for. Don't go ducking and bowing, cringing and crawling, through the world; believing in Nature, and sacrificing to Jehovah; believing in individuality, and yet paying priests, and building their "joss-houses!" We can do infinitely better.

Our God is Nature — father, mother. As near to thy child, hard-handed mechanic, and thy child as dear to God, as the infant Jesus was when he lay on the breast of Mary. On his broad bosom we shall be borne beyond death to the glorious world of the hereafter, — life there a continuance of life here, a spiritual blossoming of what this life has been but the bud.

We can make no compromise with orthodoxy henceforth and forever. Ours is a new religion, a new God, a new heaven, and a gospel which is destined to make a new earth. We do not blame the people who have accepted the old (they probably did the best they could); but these old skeletons shall not reach their bony hands out of their mouldy sepulchres, and drag us in to chatter with them. Ours the living present; ours the sunshine and the song of birds, the sound of purling brooks, the joy of the living world ripening in God's smile, — the vestibule of heaven.